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‘Youthscapes’ and escapes in rural Africa: education, mobility and livelihood trajectories for young people in Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

This article draws attention to the significance of mobility in shaping the educational and livelihood trajectories of rural young people in sub-Saharan Africa, with particular reference to a case study in Eastern Cape, South Africa. Young rural people commonly face both economic and political exclusions. As our case study illustrates, in the context of work demands, restricted basic education and poverty, the potential for escape, whether to secondary education or city jobs, is limited and in some respects highly gendered. We draw principally on ethnographic material from interviews with people aged 9 to 18 years, their parents, teachers and other key informants.

Key words

mobility, education, workloads, livelihoods, gender, inter-generational friction, South Africa

Introduction

There is now a substantial body of research on young people’s livelihoods in urban African contexts, often linked to unease with and concerns about the potential dangers posed by disaffected and unruly urban youth (for example, Gough 2008, Langevang 2008). By contrast there has been relatively little recent work on youth livelihoods and livelihood transitions in contemporary rural society in Africa, except in war and post-conflict contexts and, to a lesser extent, with reference to commercial agriculture. This article aims to help redress the research gap through an exploration of the linkages between mobility and livelihood opportunities for young people. Our conclusions are based on a three-year study of the daily mobility of 9-18 year olds in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa¹. Many of the broader points made here have resonance across our (12) rural research sites in all three countries but, for reasons of space, we draw on detailed findings from research conducted in just one region, Eastern Cape, South Africa, to illustrate the argument.

Young peoples’ lives in rural sub-Saharan Africa are commonly shaped by both economic and political exclusions: poverty and lack of voice. Their labour contributions usually commence at an early age and are often crucial to family farm production (Bass, 2004), but such work is mostly unpaid and controlled by other household members: it does not usually bring autonomy, at least in the short term. Moreover, the work contributions required of young people may affect their educational attainment: school attendance can be regularly delayed, impeded and curtailed by work demands (though, as Bourdillon (2006) emphasises, this is not an inevitable outcome but depends on social context, the kind of work and relationships within it). In the context of limited

¹ This is a three-year ESRC/DFID-funded study: full details are available at www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility.

educational opportunities in rural areas and often very negative perceptions of agricultural work among today's youth, the competing attractions for aspiring youth offered by escape to the city are enormous. However, as our case study illustrates, the potential for escape, whether to secondary education or city jobs, is limited and, in some respects, highly gendered.

Our article shows how physical mobility and associated access to regular, affordable transport can be a key factor shaping young people's potential to escape the village. It has direct implications for access to work opportunities, since non-agricultural work or multiplex livelihoods (where income is derived from a variety of different activities) may offer the surest route out of poverty in rural areas (Bryceson, 1999), but these options are often very limited in the village context. The potential to make a daily journey to the nearest town, whether to trade, learn or undertake service work such as sewing, taxi driving or hairdressing, can be crucial in entering the larger market which will enable a young man or woman to accrue a modest profit and build a business. Physical mobility also has other implications for livelihoods in terms of access to health services, education and the social networks which are often crucial for future independence. Physical mobility is thus closely bound up with social mobility and has important associated impacts in terms of inter-generational tensions and negotiation, as we discuss further below.

The research was conducted in 8 sites per country (two urban, two peri-urban, two rural with services - usually a primary school, sometimes a clinic - and two classified as remote rural with no services). It included intensive qualitative research (in-depth interviews, life histories, focus group discussions, accompanied walks²) with young people, their parents, teachers and other key informants such as health workers and transport operators, followed by a questionnaire survey of nearly 3,000 children aged 9-18 years. In this article we draw principally on ethnographic data from the two rural sites where research was concentrated in Eastern Cape.

Following a review of the Eastern Cape context, we examine the economic and political exclusions faced by young people in our two study villages and the implications for livelihoods, explore youth attitudes to rural work and consider the potential of formal education for escape. The particular constraints on rural girls' mobility and autonomy form an important strand in the discussion. The final section also considers permanent migration to urban areas.

Eastern Cape and the case study sites

OR Tambo District Municipality in Eastern Cape Province, once part of the homeland of Transkei, remains one of the most deprived areas of South Africa (Mashiri et al., 2005). Farm production is limited, but includes vegetables, maize and cattle. Out-migration to urban areas is a characteristic feature: many fathers and sometimes both parents are absent. Children often live with grandparents and women-headed households predominate. Women and children have borne the brunt of labour demands for many

² See Porter et al. 2010 regarding data from accompanied walks with pupils from school to home in selected study sites.

years. There are many AIDS-orphans living with family members and many families dependent mainly on social grants.

Our rural study site, Mtambalala, is a fairly large dispersed settlement approximately 16 km from Port St Johns, about 5 km along an unpaved but drivable road off the main highway connecting Port St Johns with Mthatha. It is relatively well-off for services since it has two primary schools, a clinic and three retail stores selling basic groceries and household goods. Transport services to the highway (in open vans called *bakkies*) are relatively frequent.

Bolani, our remote rural study settlement, is accessible only on foot along narrow paths.³ The footpath to Mtambalala, a distance of about 4 km, crosses a hill which stands around 120 metres above the surrounding land. Bolani has approximately 300 households but no services: the nearest primary school is at Mtambalala, the nearest secondary school is about 15kms distant and the nearest hospital lies over 18 km away. There is neither piped water nor mains electricity in either village.

Youth exclusions in the village: implications for livelihoods

In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa's urban areas, where youth have sometimes managed to carve out niches where they can be seen and heard (e.g. Langevang, 2008), economic and political exclusions are widespread in rural areas (de Boeck and Honwana, 2005). The majority of work required of young people or available to them is unpaid and occurs within the household (Andvig, 2001:6, 13). Recent trends such as the widespread development of women's microfinance enterprises across sub-Saharan Africa may have actually increased requirements for children's labour, especially girls (Arku and Arku, 2009). Any lucrative NGO incentives, by contrast, are commonly appropriated by adults. Young people, especially girls, are often expected to volunteer assistance to village projects and NGOs rarely work with rural youth except regarding HIV and AIDS (Campbell et al., 2009). There is no specific evidence of microfinance initiatives increasing girls' work or of NGO incentives being appropriated by adults in our study sites, but there is ample evidence of the way children and young people are expected to contribute to family support.

Rural children were found participating significantly in domestic/family labour in Eastern Cape (as in all our research locations) from about 6-7 years. Water carrying, firewood collection and cleaning are basic tasks that girls are required to undertake, though young boys also assist:

'it is a norm among almost every household that a girl child has the responsibility of collecting water and firewood before she come to school...for girls it starts at the age of five. In winter when the nearby streams are dry they are compelled to travel some kilometres to the river' [woman schoolteacher, Mtambalala]

This is seen as part of the process of socialisation, learning tasks in preparation for adulthood, a common perspective among South African adults (Bray 2003):

³ One circuitous route has been improved subsequently (a gravel surface, bridge repairs).

'the 9 year old [girl] goes to the forest to pick firewood ... she uses a 10 litre bucket to fetch water ...it is important for kids to work because it teaches them to be responsible and know how to take care of things in the house.' [mother of two, Mtambalala]

If there are no girls in the house, or the girls are very young, then boys must participate more fully in such tasks:

'they fetch water, collect firewood and clean. I send them to sell the vegetables at Gemvale... on the holidays and on weekends. This is the only way we can survive... . It teaches them respect'.

[mother of two boys, 6 and 9 years, Bolani]

Young people are also commonly expected to work on the family farm to contribute to household funds and school fees:

'During the wet season the whole family is expected to work in the field, ploughing. We all help. My father says this is the only way... if we don't work we'll starve and we won't have money to go to school'.

[girl 17 years, Bolani]

Girls' work burdens reflect, in part, the transport gap in sub-Saharan Africa: in Eastern Cape, as in our other rural study sites, females are culturally expected to carry loads wherever motorised transport is unavailable, insufficient or too costly (Potgieter et al., 2006, Porter et al., 2007). Boys up to their mid-teens may help with this work, but girls bear the brunt of the carrying burden. In areas with high HIV and AIDS prevalence like South Africa, girls may also have substantial caring duties. Girls tend to be further used as domestic anchors, left at home to care for siblings when their mother/care giver goes to town or to the fields. Girls consequently face considerable time poverty: there are so many daily work tasks to be completed that it is difficult to fit everything in and leisure time is rare. In Eastern Cape, however, by contrast with most of our rural study sites, there is also significant daily work for boys among the many families which keep livestock, especially in the planting season when unattended animals will invade the fields. Boys' work burden may, in some cases, equal or exceed that of girls.

Clearly, the work demanded of young people is substantial and perhaps inevitably encourages resentment, as has also been observed elsewhere in South Africa (Streak et al. 2007). When we asked rural young people whether they had a voice in family and community affairs, everywhere the majority (even among 16-18 year olds) could not recall any instance, despite their substantial contributions to family production and reproduction. In Mtambalala, for example, an 18 year old boy with a child of his own (living elsewhere) observed *'sometimes they [parents] don't understand that I am old and they want to treat me like the young children in the house'*. When we raised the same question with adults, the concept of child contributions to family decision-making was generally dismissed and occasionally caused offence:

'All children in this area work hard.... Are you here to find out if we are abusing our children? It's all about children's rights, rights, rights. We also have a responsibility to groom them to become better people.'
[grandmother-carer of 12-year old boy, Bolani].

The reluctance of adults to recognise the potential value of youth participation in family decision-making and civic life has been recorded widely across Africa but may be especially widespread in South Africa where, in the context of youth violence in the apartheid era, a particularly strong generational cleavage has arguably emerged (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Campbell et al., 2009).

Turning away from agriculture

Agriculture is not considered a viable occupation either by young people or their carers in Eastern Cape; migration is a long-established response to difficult rural conditions:

'I would want them to live here but there is no future... most young people leave us old people to suffer here and they don't support us leaving us to raise their children'. [grandmother-carer, Bolani]

It is not simply that an urban career is considered vital to success, but that to succeed in the village is perceived to bring risks of envy and witchcraft. This emerged in a number of interviews:

'Many young people are running away ... I wouldn't encourage them to stay because there is no future here. Even if they succeed people might become jealous of them and then bewitch them' [mother of four, Bolani]

In contrast, formal education is considered a key escape route:

'The future for children here is very bleak. The only way they can prosper is to get an education and move out of this place.' [mother of four, Mtambalala]

Older villagers have blamed formal education for youth disenchantment with agriculture and migration to the city in some African contexts (e.g. Bolten, 2009: 72 re Sierra Leone). However, in Eastern Cape (as in our other research sites), the emphasis in both adult and youth discourse is on education as a route to family success. Sadly, the potential for Western formal education to transform lives implied by so many of our interviewees may be more imagined than real, as the following section observes.

Formal education as an escape route?

1. Mobility, transport and basic education

Statistics currently available show much improved enrolment in primary education in South Africa (as across most of sub-Saharan Africa) but *attendance* figures are well below enrolment in many rural areas⁴. In part this can be explained by children's heavy

⁴ Primary completion rate increases, associated with efforts to reach the MDGs, include: Ghana, 1991, 61%; 2006, 71%. Malawi, 1991, 29%; 2006, 55%. South Africa, 1991, 76%; 2006, 100%. (World Development Report 2009). South African attendance figures are widely considered suspect but teachers interviewed in this study referred to attendance well below enrolment in their schools.

work demands, including those necessitated by lack of regular, reliable and affordable motorised transport, but there are further linkages between education, physical mobility and distance from school which need to be considered. The impact of the distance between home and school on learning achievements, in particular, has received little specific attention in the literature.

Only primary education is available in most of rural Eastern Cape. In remoter settlements like Bolani there is no school whatsoever and children must walk long distances even for primary education. A grandmother-carer of two children in Bolani observed, *'most children in this settlement have dropped out of school. They can't handle the distance.'* One 22-year old pupil reflected, as we walked home from school with him over steep, scree slopes: *'When I think about school my heart becomes bitter for the distance I travel to school is very long for me. At times I think about dropping out of school like other children in my location'*. His school career only started at the age of 12 because of the long, difficult journey. It is common for parents to delay children's school entry in all the remote villages where we worked, because of the journey length. This delay in starting school can cause serious embarrassment when the child is in class with much younger pupils: *'when I have to stand in the assembly with little children ... they laugh at me saying that I am an 'ancestor' of the school'* [girl 18 years, Bolani].

A long walk to school, especially when coupled with a heavy work load out of school, is also likely to contribute to poor performance, because children are exhausted before they even start their school day. There were reports from children, parents and teachers of children arriving at school from both villages tired, hungry and unable to concentrate. Heady (2003) has observed (in Ghana) that work outside the home has a substantial effect on learning achievement, either because of exhaustion or a diversion of interest away from academic concerns. We found many children withdrawn from school for days at a time, because their work contribution must take precedence. Often they must help their parents meet essential contributions to schooling: uniform, extra stationery, etc.⁵ In this context it is unsurprising that parents often maintain such an ambivalent attitude to education. There is, on the one hand, as we have seen, a positive discourse around education as a precursor to the development of alternative family livelihoods, but this is commonly outweighed by the negative reality of competing needs for survival at home:

'at least one day in they week they have to miss school to help me with the ploughing otherwise ...there will be no food for them to eat'. [mother of four, Bolani]

Ziyana's story sums up the difficulties that rural schoolchildren (especially girls) commonly face:

'during school days I make sure I do all my work prior to going to school otherwise I will be late. ... they punish us at school or they close the gate and we end up missing morning classes.... by the time I start doing my homework I'm already tired and I want to sleep' [girl 17 years, Bolani]

⁵ At government primary schools, fees are structured by grade but poor parents are exempt.

However, many boys also reported having to negotiate competing demands on their time in Eastern Cape because animal husbandry forms a significant part of the household economy: *'sometimes I don't go to school if I have to take the cattle to the dipping tank or else I will arrive late to school [and be punished]'* [boy 16 years, Bolani].

Attendance at rural schools varies seasonally, not only according to family work demands, but also in relation to access. Routes are particularly hazardous in rainy periods when rivers can rise rapidly. One father in Mtambalala also observed that winter travel is especially difficult for girls because they must leave for school while it is still dark and are thus vulnerable to physical attack. Consequently, girls are encouraged to walk in groups. Even in Mtambalala, despite the presence of two primary schools, the dispersed settlement pattern means that some children have to travel over two kilometres to school and report a range of hazards from streams in spate to aggressive dogs and unwanted 'love proposals'.

Heavy work demands on children, when coupled with remote residence, frequently lead to late enrolment, poor attendance and early withdrawal from basic education. A long journey appears, in many cases, to be the tipping point in a context where school attendance is a constant process of inter-generational negotiation.

2. Mobility, transport and secondary education

Migration for education is common in Africa, especially at secondary level, where provision is mostly restricted to urban centres. Although South Africa is in a better position than other African countries to provide secondary education, 'quality is very uneven and differences in performance vast' (Lewin and Sayed, 2005: 112). There are usually two options open to children in remote settlements who have completed primary education, and have the funds to pay secondary school fees. These are either a) temporary migration to a settlement with a secondary school (residence at the school; with relatives nearby, possibly in a fostering arrangement which requires work contributions from the child; or so-called 'self-boarding' i.e. renting a room) or b) a long daily walk from home.

In Mtambalala there is transport available to the secondary school: a contract taxi picks up children of families who can afford to pay (c. 100 Rand [\$13.6 US] per month). However the taxi sometimes breaks down, making the pupils late. The taxi costs are also too high for some, who must either find weekly lodgings near the secondary school or walk home each day. One boy, now 18, recalls:

'I used to travel from home to Ntafufu every day. I walked to school. I would have to wake up at 3- o'clock in the morning to prepare for school. The distance ... made me drop out of school because waking up early every day was difficult'.

Only a few children, mostly boys, have access to a bicycle to get to school. Cycling appears to be considered inappropriate for girls: *'It would seem strange to see a girl riding a bicycle in this settlement because it is unheard of.'* [boy 18 years, Mtambalala].

In remote Bolani, many children do not even complete basic education because of the distances involved. They are consequently ineligible for secondary education. Even

those who complete primary are unlikely to move on to secondary school, as one mother of six lamented: *'they can't continue to high school because there are no schools [near] I only know of one child who is in secondary school.'*

Others suggested that this still resulted in children migrating out of Bolani:

Our community is very isolated This has resulted in many of the young people ...losing hope and leaving.... they can't afford to go to high school because there is no transport... and they end up roaming around and others turning to stealing to survive.' [mother of four]

Some blamed their failure to pass examinations at secondary school and consequent withdrawal on this daily walk [e.g. life history with 35 year-old man, Mtambalala]. The majority of parents interviewed observed that they did not have money either for renting accommodation or for school transport.

Moreover, there are broader issues concerning educational quality: *'There are no high schools here and the ones that are close don't provide quality education because most of the children fail their matric.'* [mother of five, Mtambalala]. Having visited a number of schools (primary and secondary) in Eastern Cape, it is clear that quality is likely to be a significant issue. Facilities and infrastructure are often limited and staff-pupil ratios high, especially in rural primary schools (e.g. 1:96 in grade 3 in one school). It is all the more remarkable (and arguably depressing) that children make long, arduous and possibly dangerous journeys to attend schools which offer rather little in the way of quality education. In some cases the availability of a free meal (through the national school feeding scheme) is reportedly the main attraction.

Mobility and autonomy: a gender perspective

Unlike most of sub-Saharan Africa, in South Africa girls tend to be as commonly enrolled in school as boys. The Gender Parity Index⁶ is particularly high in Eastern Cape, partly because of the demand for boys' work as livestock herders. However, in our two rural sites, although girls are enrolled, drop-out rates appear to be high. Teen pregnancy forms part of this story but lower physical mobility or mobility potential is also substantially implicated, though this is rarely reported in any detail in the literature. Both fathers and mothers showed considerable concern that girls' mobility, whether on the journey to school or in other contexts, could leave them open to attack. Consequently, girls are allowed much less freedom than their brothers: such physical mobility constraints have important implications for social mobility.

In Bolani, where many people – both adults and children- expressed fear of girls being raped,⁷ a mother of two girls observed:

'Boys can handle anything because they know what is happening around the settlement when they go hunting and cattle herding With girls it is different

⁶ Statistics collected by South Africa's Department of Education. However, Children's Institute, UCT, 2009, suggests the data is unreliable. See www.childrencount.ci.org.za last accessed 27/10/09.

⁷ The last reported rape here had occurred 5 years earlier.

because they are vulnerable; they can't defend themselves.... It is not safe for a girl to walk alone to go fetch firewood in the forest because of the boys who hide ... and take advantage of them.'

Another mother in Bolani contrasted her son's freedom to travel with the concerns she had for her daughter:

'my eldest boy started travelling alone when he was 13 yrs old because I had to send him to town to buy thingsit is not safe for a girl as young as 14 years and below to travel alone on public transport because some people might steal their money... I am afraid that they might do something bad to [my] young daughter if she were to travel alone...Especially at the taxi rank, the drivers are very rude..'

Girls' walking is acceptable along specific routes in daytime (especially in groups) because it is essential for household production and reproduction, but walking alone, mobility at night and living away from home clearly all give cause for concern. As we have seen, cycling seems to be entirely off the agenda for girls. Presumed premarital relationships are commonly central to the concerns expressed by parents and carers:

There is a cell phone that my daughter has. I don't know who bought it for her. ... she is renting in someone's home.. Since she has been going to secondary school her behaviour has changed' [mother of three]

This latter quotation raises some important issues about migration and premarital relationships as a form of livelihood support among young girls. In South Africa, many people referred to schoolgirls using so-called sugar daddies (older men) to acquire key items like smart mobile phones. In southern Africa, where the pattern of girls having older sexual partners has been linked to HIV and AIDS risks, intimate relationships are conventionally intertwined with money or gifts (Bryceson and Fonseca 2006; Dunkle et al. 2007; Poulin 2007). The implications of such liaisons for girls' school careers are rarely positive.

Migration appears to be perceived as the ultimate escape, both for girls and boys, but for girls such opportunities are rarer and often evidently more problematic. Nonetheless, many young girls are keen to move to town, not just for work but for all that the city might offer:

'Here in Bolani there are no schools, no roads and no transport and clinics... so I don't see myself staying for long'. [Zodwa, secondary schoolgirl, 16 years]

Rural parents and grandparent-carers are often particularly reluctant to see their daughters leave for town, whether because of loss of labour, contact with the child, or concerns for their safety and well-being. While village girls dream of jobs in nursing, teaching, dressmaking and similar (generally 'female') occupations, given their restricted education and parental constraints, there is scant hope of achieving these aspirations:

'I want to be a lawyer... I will have to go and live with my relatives in Mthatha...[the main obstacle is] if I get pregnant' [girl 16 years, Bolani]

'I used to have a dream of becoming a teacher. I no longer have that dream ...The father of my baby is supporting his child...[he] is married so he cannot marry me as well'. [girl 19 years, Bolani]

Return to school after the birth of a child is now widely encouraged by African governments, and there are girls with babies in Mtambalala who continue in education. We interviewed one who leaves her 7-month old baby during with week with her mother while she boards. But childcare and associated costs often bring girls' schooling to a premature close.

Parents are often more welcoming of sons' migration: whereas girls are perceived as likely to get pregnant and return home with another burden to be supported, boys (it is hoped) may accumulate assets, renegotiate their social position, becoming wealthy adults and a better support network for the family. But if getting on means getting out (Jones and Chant, 2009:193), as Bird et al. (n.d. 2002?) comment, remoter rural areas, in particular, are still often *de facto* labour reserves. They suggest that investment in education is crucial if young people from these areas are to even begin to compete in national labour markets.

Unfortunately, given the input young people are expected to make into household production and reproduction, improvements in the education system alone will not be sufficient. Ersado's (2005) suggestion (based on Zimbabwean data) that improved access to credit could enhance rural school enrolment and alleviate child labour could be effective in some regions, but there appears to be a danger that maternal access to credit would increase rather than reduce requirements for girls' labour in Eastern Cape, as in our other study sites, so long as the current gendered work patterns persist. Recent work in rural Malawi supports the contention that household access to micro-credit raises the probability of child work in some households (Hazarika and Sarangi, 2008). Andvig (2001: 46) argues that a change in norms about male and female tasks could be feasible, allowing a redistribution of workload (to boys) which would improve efficiency and possibly make injections of credit more effective regarding girls' education. However, in the Eastern Cape context of a high GPI this argument appears to have limited relevance. Here, support to girls at secondary school through supervised boarding provision, perhaps coupled with some form of mentoring by older women, is probably most urgently needed. Nonetheless, it is also important to recognise that jobs in town will generally depend on more than education: contacts and/or start up capital, are usually vital (Jones and Chant, 2009: 194; Dorward et al., 2009:242).

Conclusion: rural youthscapes and escapes

This article has emphasised the paradox that rural young people, often perceived by elders to be strong, resilient and a prime source of parental wealth and security, are commonly among the village's poorest occupants. They are considered old enough to work from an early age, but excluded from the benefits of participation in adult deliberations.

Controlled (pedestrian) youth mobility, especially of girls, is key to family survival in Eastern Cape, as in all our rural research sites. Consequently, particular efforts are made to socialise girls from an early age. Andvig's observation (2001: 61, citing Elster, 1989) that in societies where women's tasks includes disciplining children, girls who they find more easily observed and sanctioned than boys will be made to work more because this reduces the monitoring costs for women, appears relevant to this discussion. The time poverty and high surveillance and physical mobility restrictions which rural girls, in particular, experience, appears to impinge on their opportunities to benefit from formal education and build social networks which might allow them to develop livelihood opportunities with more potential. Transport constraints at household level clearly have a severe impact on girls' school access and performance (with knock-on impacts on social mobility), though boys are also constrained, in their case by labour demands associated with livestock keeping. Livelihood potential is further limited by strong social norms regarding 'appropriate' behaviour and livelihoods for females. Abduction and rape may be a real threat, but fear of attack may also be encouraged by elders, in order to confine young girls to 'safe' spaces. Pregnancy and threat of pregnancy have formed a strong sub-theme in the gender discussions above, and while pregnancy may sometimes initially appear to offer escape, unplanned teen pregnancy and early marriage further reduces girls' mobility and occupational options.

The frustrations generated among young people by heavy workloads, surveillance, youth exclusions and immobility are inevitably great. Inter-generational frictions focused on access to resources, youth sexuality and youth mobility are not surprisingly evident in Eastern Cape (and all our rural study sites), though the way these play out in practice varies to some degree depending on family and local context. In Eastern Cape and other southern African rural study sites adults perceive that rural life offers little opportunity. Some adults even expressed fear that success in the village will bring dangers of envy and associated sorcery. However, while they look to sons to acquire a basic education, and then find new, more lucrative, livelihoods in the city, daughters are commonly expected to focus their efforts on the (often *de facto* woman-headed) home and to support household reproduction until they marry. The extent to which adults and young people express faith in the transformative power of formal education and its potential value as a route to better livelihoods (albeit at the same time recognising the inadequacies of local schools) is sadly unrealistic. Work pressures at home and resource failures at school militate against children being open to and receiving quality education and are likely to persist at least in the medium term.

Rural youth's frustrations contrast with their understanding of physical mobility as opportunity, opening up spaces beyond adult surveillance. Physical mobility is also attached in young people's perceptions to social mobility: migration to a distant (urban) place is perceived to offer the ultimate escape from rural poverty. In the complex interconnections between young people's work, education and livelihood trajectories, mobility represents an intrinsic component of generational negotiation. It is a key yet potentially hazardous route in the transition to livelihood independence and adulthood.

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